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Letter

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By Maydelle Smith Meier

8213 Dellwood, N.E.
Albuquerque, NM
December 8, 1986

Dear Dr. Thomas,

Your article on Union School, District 77, touched me deeply and brought a flood of memories as you wrote of the early days when my parents, Ben and Deborah Smith, were teaching there. I want to share a few thoughts about Union, too, as I myself attended there. Mother and I moved to Union in 1927, while my dad moved to Portales, New Mexico, to set up a Magnolia Petroleum Company (Mobil) wholesale business, with C. D. Patterson, also of Weatherford. My parents felt that I should continue my education in the fourth grade in Weatherford, rather than risk the unfounded feeling that teacher's daughter would be teacher's pet. So every day, I walked the half mile from the teacherage to catch the bus to Weatherford, while others came to Union School.

It started on April 7, 1938, and snowed heavily through April 8. When the storm was over, roads were completely blocked. I could walk over fences without catching on one barb and could walk right up on the roof of the horse barn. There was no way I could go to Weatherford, and at that point I became a Union student and remained so for two more years.

There were five of us in my class: Clede Gail Weese, Margaret Leonard, Lorene Winter, Dwayne Perkins, and I, with Shirley Leonard the only student in the grade just below us. Other names come to mind, too, like Jimmy Weese, Betty Horst, Claudette Morton, and I'm sure I'd remember more if given a little prompting, as we were a close-knit group. In all, there were 19 students in the school, all in one room, all helping one another and concerned about one another. There was also much learning going on.

Dwayne rode a paint horse to school, rain or shine (and how I envied him!). He came early to help my mother build a fire in the big coal stove, sweep the floor, and get things ready for school each day. There were advantages to living on the school grounds. I could play on the swings at any time, even though it was lonely swinging alone. My imagination knew no bounds as I daydreamed about Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret, imagining they would be touring Oklahoma, and their car would break down right in front of our school, so I had playmates for a time. The present Queen of England would be surprised to learn of this, I'm sure.

Comforts and conveniences were not among the advantages of living in the teacherage. The cistern water was delicious but had to be carried in by the bucket full. The coal cookstove had to be fed constantly. Ours had a twenty-gallon reservoir on the side, providing warm water for a washtub full on Saturday nights. The telephone would speak and crack during an electrical storm. We listened to a battery-run radio very sparingly, and I remember how eerie it was to hear "The shadow knows..." Life was harder. Life was simpler. Life was happy, even with my dad so far away, as Union had a happy spirit. And I'll never forget my last sight of the school that day in late May, 1940, when we drove away in a truck, filled with our possessions, headed for Portales. I was riding in the back, all alone, and as we crested the small rise just south of the school, I took one last look, with tears in my eyes, as I said to no one in particular, "Goodbye, Union. I love you."

Sincerely yours,
Maydelle Smith Meier

MAYDELLE SMITH MEIER, as a result of being a part of the Union 77 experience, has provided WESTVIEW readers with a new perspective. Mrs. Meier now lives and teaches in Albuquerque.

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